

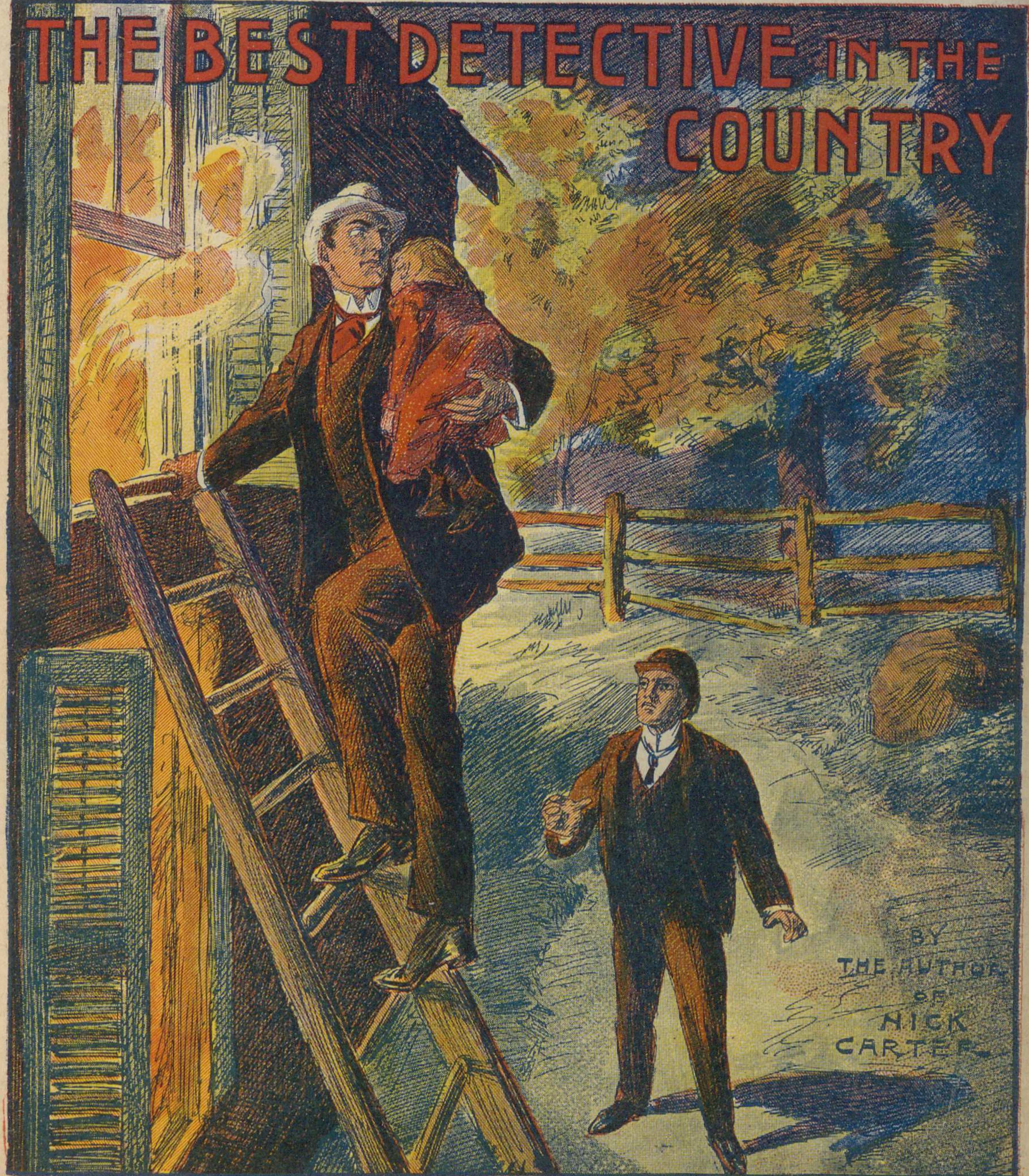
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE BEST DETECTIVE IN THE
COUNTRY



WHEN HE RETURNED TO CHICK'S SIDE NICK BORE THE CHILD IN HIS ARMS.

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The Best Detective in the Country;

OR,

A PROMPT REPLY TO A TELEGRAM.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

NICK CARTER'S STRANGE CASE AT BLANKVILLE.

"Do I speak to Dr. Vivian Burns?"

"Yes. But you have the advantage over me."

"I am here at your request."

"Surely you are not—"

The young man arose from his seat and stood facing his elderly, respectable looking visitor with a stare which was full of doubt.

"I am Nick Carter."

"The detective?"

"Yes, the detective. I believe you sent that."

Nick handed the young man a telegram which ran thus:

"Blankville, June —, 1894.

"To Nicholas Carter, New York City:—Can you come here at once on a case which will require the best detective skill in the country and unquestioned bravery to handle successfully? Please answer.

"Dr. Vivian Burns."

"But you didn't answer the dispatch, and therefore—"

"Oh, but I did answer it," smiled Nick. "I answered it in person."

"I was expecting an answer by wire, and had about given you up. That accounts for your appearance being a surprise to a certain extent. Besides, I expected to see a young man. I always understood Nick Carter was young and—"

"Well," interrupted Nick, "appearances are often deceptive. It doesn't always do for a detective to look too much like himself when he goes among strangers to tackle a hard case. From what your telegram says I imagine it is no usual task into which you have called me."

"Indeed it is not. I doubt whether in all your experience—varied as it must be—you ever met with a case at all similar."

"Of that I shall judge when you tell me what the case is. What is it I am asked to do?"

"To find a missing child, or discover how it disappeared; that is primarily your work."

"Whose child is missing?"

"Mine."

"How old is it?"

"Two years."

"When did it disappear?"

"Last night."

"From where?"

"From my house."

"Kidnaped?"

"Presumably."

"Why do you say 'presumably'?"

"Because there is a curious element of mystery about the little girl's disappearance."

"What is this mystery?"

"How she was taken from the house."

"You mean that there was no place left unguarded by which the abductor's entrance or exit could be explained?"

"Yes."

"You said this was to be primarily my work. What do you mean by that?"

"There is a deeper mystery back of my little girl's disappearance. The person who stole her left in her place that which has prostrated my mother with terror and dread."

"And the things which were left by the unknown kidnaper—what were they?"

"These."

The young physician opened a drawer of the desk before him, from which he took three surprising things and laid them before the puzzled detective.

One was a ring in which was set the cameo face of a beautiful girl. Nick picked up the ring and looked for an inscription on the inside, which he found. It was:

From LUCILLE
to
JEROME,
1867.

Nick then turned his attention to the other articles.

One was composed of the three bones of the finger of a human hand neatly held together at the joints by wire. The last bone bore testimony to the fact that it had been severed from the hand near the knuckle joint.

From the size of the bones Nick was sure the finger had come from the hand of a man.

The third article of the three puzzled Nick at first. It was a gruesome looking object about two inches long, conical in shape, shriveled and wrinkled, and had the texture of leather.

The detective turned the object over in his hands several times before a realization of the truth flashed on his mind.

He was handling a dried-up human tongue.

"What do these three things represent, doctor?" he asked, looking up at the pale, nervous man before him, who he saw was battling desperately to retain self-control.

"They mean much more than I can tell you, Mr. Carter. I only know that they represent the vengeance of a man which was wrought years ago when I was a boy, and which it seems has not yet been glutted."

"Well, I should like to hear all about it."

"I know too little of the story. I will have to take you to one who can put you thoroughly into possession of the facts."

"Who is that?"

"My mother."

"Then the sooner I see her the better it will be. I have no time to lose."

"And I have no desire that you should lose any time, either, as you will understand when you have all your facts in hand. We will go to the house now and see my mother."

Dr. Burns locked up his office, and with Nick at his side in his buggy was soon being driven through the streets of Blankville, on his way to Dr. Burns' residence.

Their appearances as they drove along seemed to excite very little notice. Occa-

sionally some one would greet Dr. Burns with a nod, a smile or a move of the hand, but there was no mark or curiosity or sympathy exhibited by any one.

The truth suddenly forced itself upon Nick's mind, and he said:

"Am I right in supposing that you have not let the fact of your child's disappearance become general news?"

"You are. For reasons which you will soon understand we have not let the information get abroad."

"There is more in this kidnaping case than appears on the surface," mused Nick.

And that surmise was correct, for he was just entering upon a piece of very puzzling work.

CHAPTER II.

THE RING, THE BONES, AND THE TONGUE.

The house to which Nick was taken by Dr. Burns was an old-fashioned, roomy, two-story structure on the outskirts of Blankville. It was surrounded with spacious private grounds, which were covered with tall shade trees, hiding the residence entirely from persons on the adjoining street. A cement walk and a carriage drive wound their way among the trees from the street to the house.

Nick was not long in learning that Graycourt, as the place was called, was by far the most valuable and most beautiful private property in the vicinity.

"How long have you lived here, doctor?" inquired Nick, as they approached the house.

"Do you mean in Blankville?—eight years."

"I mean in this house."

"Oh! A little more than three years."

"From whom did you purchase?"

"I did not purchase. The place belongs to my wife."

"Humph!"

"I'll tell you all about it after you have seen my mother."

Arriving at the house, Nick was first ushered into a reception-room, while Dr. Burns hurried away up stairs.

Several minutes later he returned and asked Nick to follow him.

The two ascended to the second floor, and the detective was conducted into a spacious, luxuriously-furnished bed-room. His quick eyes noted the moment he entered the room that a child's small brass bedstead stood near a larger couch.

A lady reclined in the depth of an easy chair near the window. Nick was introduced to her by Dr. Burns.

"Mother, this is the noted detective, Mr. Carter," said the doctor. "He has come to have a plain talk with you."

"I am glad you are here, Mr. Carter," she said, in a voice which was weak and trembling. "God knows you are needed."

"Are you sure, mother, that you are equal to the task before you?" anxiously inquired the son.

"Yes! oh, yes! I have been silent too long. Better had I intrusted you with the whole story of the sad past, Vivian. Now that it is necessary for me to tell it to this gentleman, you must remain and hear it also—hear the full particulars of a tragedy of which you know only the bare outlines."

"The story of my father's death?"

"Yes, dear; and of your sister's disappearance."

"My sister? I never knew—I thought she died."

"Heaven grant that she did; but I now fear she did not," groaned Mrs. Burns.

Nick, meanwhile, had been studying the face of the woman before him. It was a beautiful face, though marked with the lines of much suffering. The face was thin, the hair prematurely gray, and the brown, wistful eyes had a haunted expression.

The detective concluded that Mrs. Burns

was younger than she looked. Sorrow or some life trouble had made her prematurely old.

There was an embarrassing pause after Mrs. Burns' last words quoted above. Nick took advantage of it to ask of Dr. Burns:

"Did your little girl disappear from this room?"

"Yes."

"Who was in the room at the time beside the child?"

"I was," spoke up Mrs. Burns. "Dotty has slept there at my side for the past year. I could not bear to have her out of my reach even at night."

"Is there anything unusual at the bottom of this extreme love for your grandchild, madame?"

"Oh, yes! My own little girl was stolen when she was only two years old—the same age—and Dotty was her exact image. She was a daily reminder of the baby which was taken from me; the baby for whom she was named."

Here Mrs. Burns began to weep silently. To divert her mind somewhat, Nick inquired:

"What is there so strange about this child's disappearance?"

"The manner in which she was taken out of the house," responded Dr. Burns. "Mother was the first to miss Dotty. That was about six o'clock this morning."

"No one had yet risen. She called me and Mildred, my wife. Without alarming our two servants we searched the whole house.

"Now what is strange is this:

"I've not only failed to find the slightest trace of the missing baby, but failed to discover a possible place by which any one could have taken her from the house."

"The only windows which were open during the night were three—one in this room, one in the room occupied by me and my wife, and one in the room where the two servants slept."

"The windows of this room have iron grating shutters which lock on the inside. Those shutters were locked when we examined them in our search."

"The doors leading into the other two rooms were bolted upon the inside."

"Was the door to this room bolted or even locked?"

"No."

"Then the abductor entered the room and left by that door."

"No doubt. But how did he get out of the house?"

"There was no way discovered?"

"None. Every door leading to the outside was bolted; every window which might possibly have given egress was found secured by patent fastenings, which could not have been replaced by any one from the outside."

"How about the cellar?"

"There are two doors which give access to the cellar. Both were bolted from above—on this side."

"All of which seems to indicate that the baby was removed either by or with the aid of some one on the inside."

"That theory is not tenable."

"Why?"

"There would be no one to suspect except the two servants."

"Well—and they?"

"One—the elder—has been in the Burns family for years. She was my nurse and my mother's nurse before me. Her daughter was born the same year mother saw the light first, and has never known another home than ours."

"Are there any sleep-walkers in the family?"

"Not that were ever known."

Mrs. Burns at this point interrupted:

"I would have held to that theory had it not been for those terrible mementos of my past which were left by the same person who spirited the child away."

She looked at her son appealingly.

"I have shown them to him, mother," he replied to her look.

"Where did you find them?" Nick asked.

"In my jewel case. When we could find no trace of Dotty I thought of my jewels, and believed a robber had carried her off. I went to my jewel-case on the bureau and opened the lid."

A shudder shook her frame and her face grew ghastly.

By a great effort she controlled her emotion and presently continued:

"The motive had not been one of robbery. The jewels were all there and something else."

"Those three objects which your son turned over to me?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me what they are?"

"One was a ring which I gave to my husband when we were married. It has my face cut in cameo as a setting. He wore it on the day he was murdered."

"Murdered?"

"Yes. When his body was found the ring and the finger on which he wore it were gone."

She was speaking almost in a whisper, and with great difficulty. With a mighty effort the poor woman continued:

"His tongue was also missing. To-day," she gasped, "the ring, the skeleton finger and the mummified tongue of my poor, murdered, mutilated husband had been left in my bedroom by no other than he who committed that awful crime eighteen years ago, and at the same time stole my baby girl."

"Now the fiend, whom I hoped had long since been dead, returns, steals my grandchild and leaves those terrible tokens of his fiendish crime, which robbed me of happiness in my youth."

"There was no written message left?"

"Written message?" almost shrieked Mrs. Burns. "What could he have said in words, written or spoken, so terrible as he expressed when he placed that ring, those bones and that human tongue in my jewel-case—the tongue which spoke the only words of love to me which ever made my soul thrill with happiness!"

"Oh, Mr. Carter, capture that fiend, rescue my grandchild from his devilish clutch, and I'll give you every dollar I am worth in this world."

CHAPTER III.

MRS. BURNS' REMARKABLE STORY.

After Mrs. Burns had been somewhat quieted by Nick's pacifying words, she related to him and her son, who heard most of the facts for the first time, a remarkable life story:

"I am an Englishwoman," she said, "and was born near Sydney, in Australia, where my father was one of the pioneers in business."

"My father was very successful, in a worldly sense, and I was his only child. Being young and somewhat attractive, I did not lack for suitors in that country where young people of my sex were not very plentiful, comparatively."

"Among my suitors were Jerome Burns and Adrian Lascour. They were friends and constant companions until they discovered that each was in love with me and a suitor for my hand."

"Though my preferences were decidedly for Burns, I, girl like, played his rival as a foil, and by many little arts known to girls who love a flirtation, I managed to convey the impression that Lascour was the favored suitor, though I held them both off from day to day."

"In this state of affairs a crime, too revolting to name, was committed. By the indis-

putable evidence of Burns, given with the utmost reluctance, Lascour was proven the guilty man and became a life convict.

"A few months later I became the wife of Burns. I yielded to his wishes for an immediate marriage, the more readily because I could not get rid of the accusing thought that my flirtation with Lascour had in some way brought about his downfall.

"Well, Mr. Burns and I lived very happily together. My father died soon after our marriage, and my husband took charge of his extensive business.

"The years went by. A son was born to us in the second year of our union. Six years later we were blessed with a little girl baby.

"When the girl was two years old I met with my double affliction—a blow which wrecked my life.

"My husband had gone a hundred miles or more into the interior upon some business. In his absence my little girl, 'Dotty,' was stolen. She disappeared as if invisible spirits had taken her away, and in spite of everything human power or the influence of money could do no trace of the child was ever found.

"On the same day of her disappearance my husband's dead body was found in the interior. His assassin had cut out the tongue, and hacked off the finger on which he wore my ring. Neither of the mutilated members, nor yet the ring, were ever found."

"Yet they have been carefully preserved by the murderer ever since," said Nick, as Mrs. Burns hid her pale face in her hands.
"Is that all you have to relate?"

"No. As you probably suspected, the news came about this time that Adrian Lascour and several other life convicts had escaped a week previous by killing their guard. All but Lascour and a Malaysian were recaptured."

"And Lascour was never taken?"

"So far as I know he never was."

"You, of course, believe he killed your husband?"

"I cannot doubt it."

"But the child?"

"That puzzles me, Mr. Carter. As I said, my husband was killed and my child spirited away on the same day. The crimes were committed over a hundred miles apart. It was simply impossible that he should have done both."

"He may have had an agent to help him?"

"Who?"

"Probably the Malaysian."

"Perhaps you are right," sighed Mrs. Burns.

"You did not remain long in Australia after your widowhood began?"

"Only till I became convinced that my baby was either dead or not on the continent."

"Then where did you go?"

"I took Vivian and, having converted all my late father's possessions into cash, went to England."

"When did you come here?"

"Eight years ago. I thought in this quiet place the rest of my life could be spent with only the shadow of my past sorrows to oppress me. But that fiend's vengeance has been merely held in abeyance all these years, it seems. He has struck me once more, and I do not believe he has finished his devilish work yet."

"You believe Adrian Lascour is still on your track?"

"How can I believe otherwise?"

"If Lascour has followed you here, he would be easily known, I should think."

"Why?"

"Well, Blankville is not so large but that a stranger's presence would be noticed."

"That is true," interrupted Dr. Burns,

"and I can assure you that there has not been a man, woman or child in or around Blankville during the last two weeks who is not known."

"Then," said Nick, "Adrian Lascour is here yet, and has been here for some time past."

"How is that?" queried the young doctor.

"I mean we will probably find your mother's enemy in some one of the residents of the village. A man of his character would devote his life to his one idea of vengeance. Men like him have been known to spend years in preparing for one single, simple stroke of revenge."

"Then what can we do?"

"Nothing, hastily."

"But the child—Dotty?"

"If she is alive, and I have no doubt she is not only alive, but well cared for, haste or too much publicity might endanger her life. You must have patience and bear up as philosophically as you can until I have had time to make a quiet, careful investigation among the residents of Blankville."

"Oh, sir, you will find her and bring her back safe?" sobbed the widow.

"If she is to be found I will find her. But we must also see that Lascour is not permitted to escape."

"Yes! yes! For while he lives and is at liberty my life will be a constant terror."

"Where is your wife?" suddenly inquired Nick, turning to Dr. Burns.

"Sleeping," was the reply. "She was almost thrown into hysterics when it became evident that 'Dotty' was missing. I gave her an opiate to quiet her and she finally fell asleep."

"Who lived in this house before you moved in, doctor?"

"My wife's father."

"Where is he now?"

"Dead."

"Who was he?"

"Captain George Gray."

"How much of a family had he?"

"Only Mildred, my wife."

"Were you married before or after his death?"

"Just before, at his death-bed."

"Oh. He desired the match?"

"Yes. He wanted to see Mildred's future settled before he left the world."

"You called him Captain Gray?"

"Yes. He was a retired sea captain."

"He was living here when you came?"

"No. He came here with his daughter and servant the year after we arrived."

"And servant? Surely, they didn't live in this house with only one servant?"

"Yes. But they had the services of two others, a man and his wife, Dan and Lizzie O'Grady, who lived then and still live in a little cottage near the avenue gate."

"Humph! They did not sleep here in the house?"

"No. Only Captain Gray, Mildred and the old woman, Bulah, slept beneath this roof."

"Bulah, did you say?"

"Yes. That was her name."

"A negress?"

"Not a white woman, surely. She had a very yellow skin, black hair and the blackest eyes you ever saw."

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know. She left Blankville the week after Captain Gray died, and no one ever saw her since."

"How long has Captain Gray been dead?"

"A little more than three years."

As Dr. Burns made this answer the door opened and a very beautiful young woman, whose face was excessively marked by grief and anxiety, came in.

Dr. Burns advanced to meet her, put an arm around her waist, and led her to a chair.

"Oh, Vivian! have you heard anything from her?"

"Not yet, darling; but here is the great detective, Nick Carter, and he has promised to find and bring her back safe and well."

"God bless you!" she said, turning to Nick and giving him both her hands. "I have heard so much about your powers that such a promise from you is to me what pardon would be to the condemned."

Nick had not the heart to contradict her husband's pardonable white lie. So he gave her hands a consoling pressure and replied:

"You must be a brave woman, Mrs. Burns, and trust me to bring you out of this trouble into lasting happiness."

"I will—with God's help, I will," she said, smiling up at him through her tears.

The great detective had scarcely taken his eyes from the face of Mildred Burns from the time she entered the room till she bestowed upon him that beaming look of confidence.

He was all this time struggling to bring out more clearly in his mind a half defined conviction, and with that smile from her he succeeded.

To himself he was saying as Mrs. Mildred Burns turned toward her mother-in-law:

"There are none so blind as they who will not see!" How true the old adage."

Then as he saw young Mrs. Burns stoop and give her husband's mother a loving kiss, and receive from the latter a most affectionate caress in return, he turned away, walked over to a window, looked out into the gathering twilight, and muttered under his breath:

"What a fiend that Lascour is. The depth of his vengeance is luckily not suspected by his unhappy victims.

"He has not yet struck his master blow. I must try to deprive him of power and privileges before he has a chance to reach the climax of his revenge.

"It would be terrible to think of if he were permitted to reap the full reward of his years of plotting."

CHAPTER IV.

NICK AND THE O'GRADYS.

As soon as the elder Mrs. Burns got an opportunity to speak to Nick alone she whispered:

"Mildred must not know about the little girl I lost and never found. The two children were the same age. It might take away all hope from her heart to know of my early loss."

"You are right. Does she know anything about the story of Lascour's vengeance—about the death of your husband—about Lascour himself?"

"Not a word. Why, even Vivian never knew that story, except the mere fact that Mr. Burns was killed, until I was compelled to turn over to him those awful mementos which were left in my jewel box; turn them over to him and ask him to carry them away so that they might not fall under the eyes of Mildred."

Nick proceeded under the guidance of Dr. Burns to make a rapid inspection of the house, and if he had any suspicions that all which young Burns had said was not true, he seemed to be satisfied that there was no way out of it for the abductor of little Dotty.

It was quite dark when Nick left the house, promising to meet Dr. Burns at his office next morning.

He walked down the gravel path toward the street, musing over the strange case which had come into his hands.

As he approached the street a blinking light on his left through the trees met his eyes.

"Let me see!" he muttered. "That must be the cottage in which Captain Gray's outside servants, the O'Gradys, live. I wonder if they could not give me some valuable information?"

"I'll just drop in on Mr. and Mrs. Dan O'Grady."

He found the O'Gradys spending a quiet

evening between themselves, each immersed in the ecstatic delights of an evening pipe.

Dan O'Grady was a typical Irishman of middle age, possessing a face which bespoke geniality, shrewdness and a love of his fellow men.

Lizzie O'Grady was a fine looking, buxom Irishwoman in the prime of life, who, in her girlhood days, would have precipitated a fight at a Donnybrook Fair with a single smile or wink at some favored Irish laddie.

The cottage door was open. Nick had scarcely reached its portals when O'Grady's quick eyes saw him.

In an instant the Irishman was on his feet. His pipe was whipped from his mouth, and with a bow that was deeper than it was graceful, he received the stranger at his door in true Irish politeness.

"Good avenin', yer worship. Will yez honor our poor cabin by shteppein' insoide an' havin' a pipe o' terbacky wid' me an' the ould woman?"

"I'll come in, and thank you for your kindness," laughed Nick, as he made good his words. "But with your permission, and that of your good wife," (here he bowed to Mrs. O'Grady, and received in return a rather awkward courtesy), "I'll join you with a cigar. I have one in my pocket."

"Ivery man to his taste," as the ould lady said whin she kissed her cow. Terbacky is terbacky, whether yez schmoke it wan way or anither. May St. Patrick bless the weed."

Nick pulled up a chair near the Irishman, and soon had the smoke from his cigar mingling with the cloud from Dan's pipe. Lizzie had respectfully laid her pipe on the mantel as soon as Nick entered.

"To get a light for my cigar must be my excuse for intruding on your quiet evening here," explained Nick, as soon as he had his cigar well under way.

"Sure, sor, there be no axchoose needed,

seein' that it's a favor to have your honor insoide our poor cottage," was the quick reply. You're a stranger in these parts, I dunno?"

"Yes. I came up here from the city on some business with Dr. Burns relative to this property left by his late father-in-law to his wife."

"Ye mane Cap'n Gray, I reckon."

"Yes. I will be detained a day or two. You've lived here some time?"

"Goin' onto siven years."

"You came here while Captain Gray lived up there at the house?"

"We did that. The cap'n had this cottage put up, and thin hired me an' Lizzie to come an' live in it and tind to affairs on the grounds an' about the house."

"He must have been a queer man—this Captain Gray."

"Indade he wor. A quarer man niver brathed the brith o' loife. Why, all the time we lived here under him nayther Lizzie nor I iver got our head into the big house betwaan nightfall an' dayloight."

"But they had servants in the house—he and his daughter?"

"Wan! May the devil fly away wid her black soul!"

"A woman?"

"A famale devil if there iver was a daughter o' Old Nick."

"Queer creature, eh?"

"She wor that. We didn't grave because we couldn't slape under the same roof wid her. Our throats were safer here than there while we dramed."

"Yet Captain Gray and his daughter liked this woman?"

"The cap'n did. Miss Mildred couldn't bear her," spoke up Lizzie.

"Indeed?"

"Thtrue, sor, as I am tellin' you. An' there didn't seem to be much love lost atwixt them."

Bulah niver wint near the girl, an' that's why I had all the waitin' on Miss Mildred to do myself."

"This Bulah was there till Captain Gray died, was she?"

"She wor. Thin she wint away widout sayin' devil a word to any wan, an' nobody iver seed hair or hide o' her since."

"Did Captain Gray ever have visitors—he or his daughter?"

"None except the Burnses and the Waynes."

"The Waynes?"

"Ay sor. Misther and Misthress Miles Wayne, from the city."

"And these Waynes and the Burnses were his only associates?"

"That they wor."

"How did that happen?"

"Begar, he'd have nothin' to do with the resht. They couldn't git widin a mile av him socially, an' he shut himself up from them in his big house yonder."

"How did the Burnses gain his favor?"

"He got sick, sor, and sint for the docthor. That led up to Mrs. Burns bein' invited to the house. An' the docthor an' Miss Mildred fell in love, an' that settled it."

"Captain Gray made no objection to the young folks' love-making?"

"Lor, no, sor. He seemed plased to death at it."

"Mrs. O'Grady need not have told me that," said Nick, to himself.

"And these Waynes—who were they?"

"Misther Wayne wor a broker, sor, from the city, who attinded to Captain Gray's investments. He often run up to Blankville. Sometimes he'd spind siveral days at the cap'n's house. Most av the time they'd be locked up together for hours at a time in the cap'n's stoddy."

"Very intimate, were they?"

"Like twins, sor. Sometimes Wayne would

bring his wife wid him and they'd shtay over Sunday at the hall. She wor a stunnin' lady, sor. Ye niver seed a finer-lookin' wan in your life."

"Indeed!"

"Poor thing. She died at the cap'n's house on one of these visits."

Nick's interest in the Waynes suddenly increased.

"Died, did you say?"

"Very suddintly, sor. She's buried over yonder in the graveyard jist beyant."

"What ailed her?"

"Heart failure. Her husband still comes to Blankville to visit her grave. He's here now."

"How long has she been dead?"

"Mor'n three years. She died two weeks afore the cap'n. He is buried over there, too."

"You attended the funeral?"

"Which wan?"

"Both."

"I did. I helped to lower both coffins, an' sure two more illegant corpses niver were laid to resht. They both looked as if they were jist lyin' there aslape."

"Humph!" muttered Nick, as he arose from his chair and prepared to leave.

He was saying just then to his inner self:

"I must meet this Wayne and make his acquaintance."

As if in answer to these thoughts, Dan looked over Nick's shoulder toward the open door and exclaimed:

"Be the powers! Spake av the angels an' they appear. Here is Misther Wayne now. Walk in, sor. Sure yez are welcome."

Nick arose, turned quietly around, and stood face to face with a man whom he thanked his lucky star for bringing thus opportunely into his presence.

CHAPTER V.

THE GHOST AND THE BURIAL VAULT.

Miles Wayne and Nick Carter stood looking at each other steadily for several seconds.

Nick saw standing before him a man of medium height, rather squarely built, with an erect, muscular figure, very dark skin, almost swarthy, smooth, closely-shaven face, coal-black hair and dark brown eyes. His age might be anywhere from forty to fifty-five years.

Wayne was the first to speak:

"I beg your pardon, Dan, but I was not aware you had company. Pardon me for intruding. I just dropped in to chat a little with you and get you to look after my wife's grave when you have a little time. It needs a bit of care. However, I'll call to-morrow when you will be more at leisure to talk over these things."

He was turning to go when Nick spoke up:

"I beg you will not let me deprive you of the object of your call, sir. Pray do not mind me at all."

"You are a stranger in Blankville, are you not?" asked Wayne, turning again to Nick.

"Entirely so. Until to-day I have never set foot in the village."

"It is an out-of-the-way place, and seldom sees a stranger among its residents," remarked Wayne.

"I can believe that. Nothing would have brought me here except some chance business with Dr. Burns."

Wayne began to be plainly interested in Nick. The latter could understand how much the man before him wanted a better introduction, but he refrained giving it or mentioning his name.

"I am well acquainted with Dr. Burns and his family. But I was not aware that he transacted much business outside of his profession."

"Probably he does not. My business I should say is indirectly with him or his wife, rather. In a word, I've come up here as an agent to try and buy his homestead."

Wayne stared at Nick some seconds without replying. Then he said:

"To buy this property? For whom?"

"Pardon me, but the gentleman does not want to be known in the transaction," smiled Nick.

"Well, what success have you had?"

"None as yet. I've only had one chance to talk with Dr. Burns and his wife, and neither seemed to be in a humor to discuss business. I shall see them again in the morning."

"I am going up to the house now. Shall I have the pleasure of your company there?"

"Thank you, but I just left them an hour ago."

"Then I shall probably have the pleasure of seeing you again to-morrow. Good-night."

Without waiting to hear Nick's return "good-night" Miles Wayne strode rapidly out of the room, and soon disappeared.

Turning to O'Grady as soon as Wayne was gone, Nick asked:

"How large a man was Captain Gray?"

"Jest about Mr. Wayne's size, sor."

"What did he look like?"

"Sure the cap'n had a shnow white beard an' hair, an' a very white skin. He walked wid a shtoop to his shoulders."

"An old man?"

"Siventy an' he was a day."

"Where is this graveyard where the captain and Wayne's wife is buried?"

"Not a shtone's t'row from this blissed spot. These grounds run right up agin the dividin' fence."

"This Mr. Wayne seems devoted to the memory of his late wife."

"Sure he do that. It's scarcely a night

that he do not go to the graveyard in spite av ghosts an' goblins, an' spind hours at the side av Misthress Wayne's grave."

"A brave man?" commented Nick.

"Yez may well say that, sor. Begob, he's the only livin' soul I know as iver goes inside among them graves after nightfall."

"Why?"

"Is it why, thin? 'Case no wan but him dares to face the ghosts."

"But there are no such things as ghosts, my good man!"

"Arrah! and isn't thor, though? Thin, fwhat the devil is it that people have seed in that graveyard betwixt midnight and dawn, dressed all in white, flittin' in an' out among the threes and bushes, I dunno?"

Nick was all attention to every word the Irishman uttered.

"A veritable ghost, eh?"

"Yez can gamble on it."

"How long has this ghost been walking around among the tombs?"

"For two or three years, sor."

"Has nobody ever tried to lay it?"

"Howly Moses, no!" almost yelled the Irishman.

Nick shortly afterward left the cottage, and strolled back to the one hotel of which Blankville boasted. There he met a young man who had come in on the evening train. This young man was Chick, and had followed his chief on the next train as per directions.

They at once retired to Nick's room and remained in earnest conversation till eleven o'clock. Then they both slipped out of the building by a rear door, unseen, as they believed, and made their way through vacant lots and unused alleys to the street which ran past the property of the late Captain Gray.

They had little trouble in locating the cemetery or graveyard described by O'Grady as adjoining the Gray property on the east. It

extended from the street or road backward for a distance of several hundred rods. The entire tract was covered with large forest trees and the usual shrubbery of old burial grounds.

Before they entered the cemetery they sat down on a large stone and Nick remarked, in a subdued voice:

"It is taking a rather long chance, lad, but I've an idea we'll get a glimpse of O'Grady's ghost to-night, and see what it is up to."

"You mean Miles Wayne?" inquired Chick.

"Of course. There is no doubt that the prowler in white among those tombs is he."

"What's his object?"

"We will try to find out, my boy."

"If he'll only come out to-night."

"Well, I think he will. At least he's in Blankville, and I've an idea his graveyard business at this time is unusually pressing. Let us get into some favorable hiding place where we can look around a bit."

The night was dark, with an overcast sky, and prospects of a storm before morning.

They found a place of concealment in a clump of bushes about thirty rods from the road, and began their vigil.

About half-past one o'clock their patience was luckily rewarded.

Chick was the first to see the "ghost" and he silently pointed it out to Nick.

Something was flitting in and out among the trees, and that something was of the traditional ghostly white. The uneasy spirit darted hither and thither, now disappearing, and again coming into sight in some unexpected place. At last it disappeared behind a very thick clump of bushes, and seemed to have retired for the night.

The detectives waited half an hour. Then, convinced that the ghost had gone temporarily into retirement, Nick signaled to Chick,

and led the way noiselessly to the bushes behind which the white object had last disappeared.

Into these bushes the two men crawled until they were concealed, but could see out on the other side.

There was not much to see; even if the night had been light enough.

Beyond the bushes was a small hillside, and by straining his eyes Nick managed to make out that against this hill was the opening into a burial vault.

"There is just one place that ghost could have gone, lad," whispered Nick into Chick's ear.

The latter made no answer, for none was needed.

Without another word from either, the two detectives lay there in those bushes flat upon their stomachs, waiting, watching, and fully understanding each other.

Hours passed without their reward.

Both knew that the light of dawn would soon begin to dispel the utter blackness of this dark night.

Suddenly Nick's hand closed upon Chick's arm with a grip that was not gentle.

A tall white object suddenly appeared against the dark background in front of them.

How far away from them the object was neither could determine.

There was a short pause in the white object's movement. Then came to their ears the faintest kind of a metallic noise, after which the figure in white moved a bit and paused once more.

The metallic ghost of a noise was repeated. Then the ghost glided away swiftly, and disappeared among the trees.

Nick whispered in Chick's ear:

"Come! To the hotel."

They crept from their place of concealment, and fifteen minutes later succeeded in

reaching the neighborhood of the hotel, where they again sought concealment.

They had only half an hour to wait till a man's figure strode boldly up to the building and entered.

Nick recognized him in the faint light of the dawn, aided by the dim fulgence of the lamp which burned on the hotel veranda.

"Is it your man?" asked Chick.

"Yes. Miles Wayne is the ghost of Blankville. The ghost's residence is a burial vault in the cemetery. Chick, we have some exciting work before us."

CHAPTER VI.

INTERESTING MILES WAYNE.

Chick boarded the first train for New York that morning and went flying back to the great city for a purpose which he and his chief had clearly discussed before he left Blankville.

At nine o'clock Nick called at Dr. Burns' office. The young physician, looking pale and anxious, was waiting for him.

"Any news?" was the doctor's eager greeting.

"If you mean news of your child's whereabouts, I answer no. I don't expect to get definite news on that point for several days. You and your wife and mother must bear up under that uncertainty, meanwhile, as well as you can, resting assured that none of you could take better care of the little one than she will be cared for while in the hands of her abductors."

"Mr. Carter, you speak like a man who sees his way clearly in this mysterious case."

"Then my words do not convey a wrong meaning, doctor."

"In Heaven's name——"

"Now, my dear sir," interrupted Nick, "you must not grow excited."

"But who—how——"

"Nor ask questions which it will be best

that I should not at present answer. I want you to trust me fully with this affair, and keep mum as an oyster."

"Then I fear I have already blundered."

"Why?"

"I've disclosed your identity and the object of your visit to Blankville to one person."

"To Mr. Wayne?"

"Yes. He said he had met you."

"And did he tell you that I had tried to throw him off as to my real mission up here?"

Burns showed his annoyance as he answered:

"He did. But not until I had informed him to the contrary."

Nick laughed softly, which put Burns into an easier frame of mind.

"This Wayne is a particular friend, is he not, doctor?"

"Yes; he was the best friend my wife's father had, and that is how we became so intimate."

"Well, no harm has been done by what you have told him. But from this time out please to repeat nothing to him or to any one else of my assurance of success in your behalf. If it were not that I do not desire you or your wife or your mother should suffer under the burden of hopelessness, I would have concealed, even from you three, the almost certain conviction that I will not only capture this Lascour, but restore your child to you safe and sound as well."

Dr. Burns promised to be on his guard.

Nick was not surprised a few minutes later to hear that Miles Wayne was at the door of the office.

Dr. Burns turned an anxious look upon Nick when Wayne's presence was announced.

"Let him come in," said the detective, "and then leave the rest in my hands."

The next moment Wayne entered Burns'

private office, shook hands with the doctor, and greeted Nick with a nod and a smile.

The conversation turned at once upon the case of the missing child.

It could not have surprised Burns to hear Nick talk before Wayne as if he was wholly "stumped" in his investigations.

"If we could only find some clew to the manner in which the kidnapper entered or left the building, there would be something to make a start from," said Nick, with a wrinkled brow.

"Did you examine the house carefully?" asked Wayne.

"I didn't, of course, make a minute search," was the response.

"Don't know whether there are any secret doors or passages?" queried Wayne.

"Well, we didn't search for those things. Was Captain Gray a man to indulge in such romantic secrets?"

"Why, no. But he didn't build the house, you know."

"Who did?"

"A retired minister, who lived in the house until the captain bought it—so the captain told me."

"Not likely, therefore, that there are any secret doors or traps."

"Well," said Wayne, "suppose we all go up to the house and make a thorough search."

Nick half expected such a proposition, and he fell in with it willingly.

The three men proceeded to the Burns residence, and spent two hours in inspecting every floor, wall, ceiling and closet.

Wayne led the exploration, and Nick was not half so earnest in his pretended search for hollow walls or sliding panels as he was in secretly watching every move made by Miles Wayne.

"It's no use," finally said Nick. "We might as well give it up. For once in my life I'm up against it."

"What will you do now?" inquired Wayne, rather anxiously.

"What can I do? I certainly cannot waste time here without a clew to lead me. I must return to New York this evening, where more important work is waiting for me."

"Then I'll go along. I have business at my office to-morrow. But I'll return in a few days, and do what I can to help the doctor get some trace of the little girl."

"I, too, will return in a few days," said Nick. "I do not give the case up, but will have to drop it temporarily."

"I'm going over to the cemetery to take a look at my wife's grave. Would you like to go along?" said Wayne, suddenly breaking in on Nick's conversation.

"As I can do nothing here, I might as well," replied Nick, while an unaccountable feeling of exultation shot through his heart.

In going to the cemetery Nick noted the fact that its western boundary was not more than two hundred yards from the Burns residence.

Wayne took him to a beautiful spot under a huge maple tree where two well kept graves lay near each other. A small monument stood at the head of one grave on which was the inscription:

Sacred to the Memory
of
MARY,
Beloved Wife of Miles Wayne.
Died May 1st, 1891.
Ætat 33 Years.

A much plainer stone marked the other grave. The inscription on this stone read:

Here Lies the Body
of
GEORGE GRAY.
Born October 10th, 1825.
Died May 18th, 1891.
Requiescat in Pace.

"My wife died suddenly while we were

visiting the captain, and he insisted I should bury her here on his lot," explained Wayne.

Nick allowed Wayne to lead the way into the cemetery and out again.

It did not surprise him, therefore, when while on their way out they passed an old vault built into a hill side and almost surrounded by shrubbery, which had been allowed to grow up wild.

"There's an old vault," explained Wayne, parting the bushes and pointing in at the place, "where the remains of a whole family rest."

"Has a history, eh?" encouraged Nick.

"Yes. As it was told to me, the vault was built by an eccentric resident of Blankville thirty years ago. Soon after it was finished his wife was found dead in bed one morning. A week later his eldest son fell down stairs and broke his neck. The only daughter died of malignant typhoid fever shortly afterward. The remaining son was struck by lightning and killed within the year. Then the old man killed himself when quite crazed with grief. His body was the last to be deposited in the vault, and when the doors were locked upon it, they were never afterward opened. Of late years a silly report has gone forth that the spot is haunted."

"Ghosts, eh?" smiled Nick.

"Yes. Some servant girls and timid young men are willing to swear they have seen the spirit of the unfortunate man who had the vault built hovering around this spot at night in the usual airy white robes."

Wayne's laugh was echoed by Nick. As they walked away Wayne added:

"That is why the place is neglected and allowed to grow up wild."

When Nick parted with Wayne he chuckled under his breath:

"What a wonderful book human nature is! I'd rather read in its pages than I would in any print which ever fell from the press."

"Mr. Miles Wayne, you are devilish shrewd, but Nick Carter was not born yesterday."

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT WAS FOUND IN TWO GRAVES.

Miles Wayne and Nick Carter went to New York that afternoon on that same train.

Wayne gave the detective his office card and invited him to call at his convenience.

The two parted at the depot.

Nick went direct to his home, where he met Chick. As soon as the two were alone together in the study, Nick asked:

"What have you found out about Wayne?"

"Not much, perhaps; maybe a good deal."

"Well, out with it."

"This Wayne is an old timer, Nick."

"What do you mean by 'an old timer'?"

"He has occupied his present office for the last fifteen years."

"That would make it from 1879?"

"Yep."

"Three years after Lascour escaped from Australia?"

"I guess so. But Wayne, prior to that time, was a clerk in another office on Broadway."

"How long before he opened his own office?"

"Four years."

"Sure of that?"

"Sure as shooting. I made the investigation thorough. Indeed, I talked with a man who was his room-mate in 1875. In that year Lascour was serving his term in Australia, was he not?"

"Yes."

"Then Wayne can't be Lascour."

"Humph!"

Chick looked sharply at Nick as the latter uttered that significant exclamation.

"You are still not satisfied that this man is not mixed up in the Burns tragedy?"

"You are right, Chick. Miles Wayne and Adrian Lascour have been intimately associated in some way, and Wayne knows more about the Burns mystery than he thinks any one suspects. We must find out just what he is or has been to this Lascour."

"That's all right; but how are you going about it?"

"I'll tell you presently. What else did you find out about Wayne?"

"Very little, except that he has been a changed man ever since his wife died. So much so that he sometimes acts queerly, neglects business, is morose, shuns his former associates and has made almost a hermit of himself."

"A hermit—how so?"

"Why, he has been in the habit for the last two or three years of going out on Long Island and shutting himself up in a lonesome, out-of-the-way house in charge of a solitary negro."

"Negress, you mean?"

"No. It is a man."

"And he will not receive any of his former friends there?"

"No. When he isn't shut up out there he frequently makes trips to Blankville, where it is said he spends hours in the cemetery at his wife's grave."

Chick gave Nick a wink as he imparted this information, and Nick laughed softly.

Chick broke the short silence which followed by saying:

"Nick, wouldn't it pay to explore Miles Wayne's Long Island retreat?"

"I guess it would. We'll do it, too, in good time. Just now we've other fish to fry."

Early next morning three of the most disreputable tramps ever seen around Blankville caused considerable uneasiness among the residents of that quiet neighborhood.

When the marshal of the place warned

them to "vamose" they meekly obeyed, and hobbled off down one of the roads which led out into the country.

But they did not go far.

The trio visited several farm-houses, soliciting food, and went into camp in a woods near a house where some laborers were digging a well.

As night came on and the well-diggers departed for their homes, there were signs of unusual activity in the camp of the tramps.

One of the three, who had been absent on an expedition of some kind, returned to camp shortly after sundown, and made a report in an undertone.

His companions called him Patsy.

About ten o'clock Patsy went away again. He was gone an hour. When he once more appeared before his comrades he had some heavy articles on his shoulders which he threw on the ground at the feet of the other two. These articles were two picks, two shovels and a small coil of rope.

The well-diggers had used these articles at their work during the day. Patsy had stolen them, without doubt.

No hurry to get away with the stolen articles was evinced by any of the men. On the contrary, all three were soon stretched upon the ground taking things easy. Cigars were produced, wholly inconsistent with the pretended calling of the men, and as they smoked an occasional word was passed among them in a low tone.

Midnight had passed some time before the waiting tramps showed signs of activity.

Finally he who seemed to be the leader yawned and asked:

"I wonder what time it is?"

"About two o'clock as near as I can calculate," responded one of his companions.

Then the latter reached in among his rags and brought forth, as if by magic, an elegant gold watch, the face of which he consulted by the aid of a lighted match.

"Just two exactly," he said, as the match went out.

"Then we'll be going without loss of time," replied the other, springing to his feet.

The stolen tools were divided among the three, who set off across fields in the direction of Blankville. They approached the village from the side on which Dr. Burns' residence was situated, and struck the cemetery on the side farthest from the road which ran by.

Without exchanging a word the three tramps entered the deep shadows of the cemetery, the one who appeared to be the leader going in advance, and the other two following single file.

The leader had not gone far when he struck one foot against the low foot-stone of a grave and almost fell prostrate.

"Look out there. Better see where you're going," whispered the man just behind.

"Guess you're right," assented the leader, "might as well be seen as heard, so here goes."

The rays of a circumscribed beam of light a moment later were illuminating the ground for several rods before them.

The man in front had produced a dark lantern. With its aid the three night prowlers made their way through the cemetery a little faster and without so much inconvenience. They thus carefully advanced for about ten minutes when the man with the lantern stopped.

"It's not far from this place," he muttered. "I'll have to reconnoiter a little."

So saying, he raised the stream of light from his lantern, and began to flash it around in several directions.

"Ah! I thought so," he exclaimed at last, in a low voice. "This way, boys."

Turning abruptly to his right, he took a dozen steps and stopped beside a mound of earth, at one end of which stood a large head-stone.

"This is the place," he whispered, as the other two came up and stood at his side leaning on the stolen tools, and looking down at the mound at their feet.

"Now we'll soon see what lies down there six feet below the surface," spoke the leader.

Had any one been a witness of this strange scene there would have been no doubt left as to the intention of the three mauraunders. They were about to open a grave, and it was not a new-made grave, either, for a heavy sod covered the mound, and flowers grew and bloomed near the head.

"Now, then, Patsy, take a position down toward the road about one hundred yards away, and keep your sharp ears open," commanded the leader. "Chick and I will not be long at this job if we are not interrupted."

"All right, Nick," replied the appointed sentinel, "if anybody sneaks into the cemetery he'll have to tread mighty softly if I don't hear him."

Patsy left for his place of observation. Then Nick Carter and Chick laid aside their ragged coats and took hold of their shovels.

Nick stuck his shovel into the mound first. Chick followed his example, and for half an hour the two men worked as if their lives depended on it.

At the end of that time their shovels struck upon wood.

"The vault is covered with boards, Nick," panted Chick.

"That's good," said the detective, "it will make it easier for us to manage it."

As soon as the boards were uncovered and removed, Nick and his assistant jumped out of the grave.

The cry of a night bird rang out on the still air. It was Nick's signal for calling Patsy in, and the lad responded promptly.

In a very short time the three men had the coil of rope around the coffin, which was raised and placed on the ground beside the

opening. Then Nick produced a screw-driver and opened the coffin by removing the lid.

The three men fell back precipitately to avoid the rather unpleasant odor which arose as the lid was raised.

"There isn't any doubt about it, I guess, Nick," said Patsy. "George Gray's body is in there sure enough."

"I'm not so sure of it, but I'm going to take a look," declared Nick, as he advanced and threw the rays of his lantern on the open coffin.

Chick and Patsy were at his side. All three caught sight of the coffin's contents at once. The result was a quick ejaculation from Patsy.

They saw the half decomposed body of a man drawn up as if the last muscular action was produced by great torture. One hand was clutching a bunch of hair which had been pulled from the head, and the tongue was sticking out of the almost fleshless mouth.

"Nick!" cried Patsy, "that man was buried alive."

"No doubt of it, Patsy, my boy," replied Nick, looking calmly at the coffin.

"What an awful fate for George Gray," added Patsy.

"Tell him, Chick," said Nick, turning to his chief assistant.

"It is not George Gray, Patsy," complied Chick.

"Why, how do you know?"

George Gray had long white whiskers and white hair when he was buried. This man's hair was black and his face smooth."

"Then, for the love of heaven, who is it?" cried Patsy.

Chick looked at Nick and the great detective calmly answered:

"It is the body of Miles Wayne."

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE WICKEDEST FIEND OUT OF HELL."

Nick Carter's startling words concerning the corpse in the coffin astounded and puzzled Patsy. But he knew they were no extraordinary revelations to Chick's mind.

Chick usually followed his chief's deductions much closer than Patsy, and in this instance he was close upon Nick's mental trail, but Patsy was floundering along in the dark some distance behind.

Nick noticed the Irish boy's puzzled look, and added:

"We have no time now for explanation. That will come a little later on. Daylight will be on us very soon, and we have work to do here."

Hastily placing the lid upon the coffin he screwed it down. Then, turning to his assistant, he exclaimed:

"Now, boys, lend a hand."

And so the casket which bore on its silver plate the name of George Gray, but which contained not his body, was for the second time lowered into the grave. The dirt was hurriedly thrown in, and no care was taken to replace the sod or to destroy evidence of the desecration of the tomb.

When this work was accomplished Chick turned to Nick, who was gathering up the tools, and inquired:

"How about the other one?" pointing to the grave of Mrs. Wayne.

"Not now," said Nick. "Daylight will soon be here and we have no time to spare. We know what we would find there."

The three men made their way out of the cemetery in much shorter time than it took them to enter. They left the picks and shovels where they were found, and before the sun was up they were resting under a large tree in the woods three miles south of Blankville.

After ten minutes of rest Nick reached into

a hole of the hollow trunk of the tree and pulled out several packages which Chick opened. The packages contained more respectable clothing than the three men had on, and also the material for facial disguises. In less than half an hour the detectives were completely metamorphosed, and had turned themselves from the genus tramp into a respectable looking old farmer and his two sons.

"Let me see!" said Nick, looking at his watch and consulting a time table, "we are two miles from the first station beyond Blankville, and the next train for New York will not reach that station for an hour. So we might as well rest for twenty minutes."

Meanwhile Patsy had gathered up their tramp rags and chucked them into the hole of the hollow tree.

When all three were once more lounging on the ground, Chick was the first to speak.

"Nick, there'll be a commotion in Blankville to-day," said Chick. "The people will discover that the grave of the late George Gray has been opened."

"Correct."

"There'll be only one party who will get a proper conception of the situation."

"You mean the pretended Miles Wayne?"

"Yep."

"Chick, your head is level."

"You intend that he shall know some one has opened the grave and found therein the body of Miles Wayne?"

"I do."

"But he daren't let people know what he knows?"

"Of course not. That would disclose his own guilty knowledge."

"He'll suspect who has done it?"

"I think it very probable."

"Will he try to vamoose?"

"I scarcely believe he will. The fellow is shrewd and desperate. Everything is staked

on his present plan. He will realize that to attempt to run would not serve him. However, we'll not give him much time to change his plans."

"You have indisputable evidence that Mrs. Wayne and Captain Gray were buried in those graves?"

"Certainly. Scores of Blankville people saw the bodies in the coffins and saw both coffins lowered into the graves and the graves filled up."

"Yet had we taken Mrs. Wayne's coffin from the grave we should have found it empty," said Chick, slowly.

Patsy heard the words with surprise written all over his face, but Nick smiled a compliment at the shrewd Chick, and replied:

"There is no doubt of that."

"Then what became of the bodies originally buried?"

"They were resurrected."

"And another body was substituted for Gray's?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"By the man who has since then passed for the genuine Miles Wayne."

"Now, what became of the bodies of George Gray and Mary Wayne after they were resurrected?"

"They were resuscitated—brought back to life, without a doubt," was Nick's unhesitating reply.

Neither was dead when they were put into those graves?"

"I think there is not a particle of doubt about it."

"Some means was used to suspend life—to throw them into a comatose condition resembling death, which lasted till they were resurrected and resuscitated."

"Chick, you are fast getting ahead in our art."

"Possibly. But there may be a few things on which I am not so positive in my mind."

"Well, go ahoad. Maybe I can brush away the cobwebs."

"How did the real Miles Wayne's body get substituted for George Gray's?"

"By the same process which placed George Gray there first. Only in Wayne's case no disinterment took place, and he was left to the horrible fate of returning to life in the grave and dying in reality down there under six feet of earth."

"And who, then, is the pretended Miles Wayne whom we know?"

"Whom do you think?"

"Captain George Gray, who was resurrected."

"There you and I agree. But to go still farther into the plot, who, then, must George Gray be?"

"Why, Adrian Lascour."

"Go up head, my boy."

"Why was Mrs. Wayne made the first victim of a burial alive?"

"That's clear. She was used as a test. Some one wanted to be sure that the plan would work. She was first 'treated.' Her life was suspended, her body buried, dug up at a specified time, antidotes applied and life restored."

"Then what became of her?"

"That we have yet to find out."

"Who did this?"

"George Gray and his mysterious female servant, Bulah."

"Why do you include her?"

"I'll tell you, my boy. She was described as a Malaysian, of unusual stature for a woman. I believe Bulah was a man—a member of some of those East Indian clans who are so skilled in toxicology—otherwise in poisons and sleeping potions, which place victims in a state so closely resembling death that it fools even the medical men. Gray wanted to make use of this Bulah's drugs, but demanded proof of their powers before

he surrendered to her devilish art. Therefore, he decided to try it on Mrs. Wayne. She was buried and resurrected."

"But why should you believe this Bulah aided him?"

"That's as sure as a sum in addition. I have found out that a stone slab was placed in the grave. It would require the efforts of two men of remarkable strength to lift the stone. That is why I am so sure Bulah was a man."

"And that explains why boards, instead of a stone slab, were laid over Gray's coffin. Bulah had to dig him up unassisted."

"Correct."

"Then Wayne was trapped, drugged, buried and left to his fate while Gray was metamorphosed into his double and took his place."

"Which explains the great change in the man which his friends noticed after his wife's death?"

"And probably also why he has been leading a hermit's life out in the wilds of Long Island. Nick, there is a negro in charge of that house of his out there."

"Certainly. So you told me."

"Bulah?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"What else is there in that hermitage?"

"We have that much to find out. It will be our next objective point."

"When will we investigate?"

"To-night."

"Good. How about the ghost and the old vault?"

"That will do for to-morrow night's job. Let us give Miles Wayne No. 2 a chance to show his hand."

"Say, Nick, a new thought has just entered my head."

"Well, produce it."

"George Gray was Adrian Lascour."

"Yes."

"He had a daughter who married Dr. Burns."

"Correct."

"She is just about as old as would be Mrs. Burns' missing child which disappeared at the time Lascour escaped."

"I believe you are right."

"Then why couldn't Mrs. Burns, the younger, be the stolen child of Mrs. Burns, the elder?"

"She is. I am sure of it as I am of my tax bill. If there were not all this change of proof there would still be her resemblance to her mother."

"What?"

"I am not surprised that you so exclaim. How on earth the resemblance escaped the eyes of Mrs. Burns herself, or Dr. Burns, I have been perplexing my mind to explain."

"But good heavens, Nick?"

"Well, what now?"

"Why—why if she is the long-lost child, then—she has married her brother."

"That deduction is incontrovertible. It is part of the vengeance of the wickedest fiend out of hell," was the calm reply of Nick Carter, as he proceeded to light a cigar.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LONE HOUSE ON LONG ISLAND.

Half an hour after Nick Carter spoke the words which are found in the last paragraph of chapter eight, an old farmer and two younger men, presumably his sons, boarded a train at a neighboring station and were soon flying toward New York.

When Nick and his assistants reached home, several letters awaited the detective.

One bore the Blankville post-mark, and the date of the evening before. Nick opened it. An unfinished photograph—evidently the work of an amateur artist—dropped out.

Before reading the letter, which was inclosed with the picture, save to notice that

the signature was that of Dr. Burns, Nick took a look at the photo.

Chick and Patsy were leaning over his shoulders.

The three men looked upon a strange sight.

The picture was a photograph of a little girl not much more than a baby.

The little girl was lying on her back full length. Her eyes were open, but fixed. The lips were slightly apart, and a paleness as of death was on her face.

The first impression was that the child was dead.

Handing the picture to Chick, Nick read Burns' letter aloud :

"DEAR MR. CARTER: I inclose herein a picture which came this afternoon in the mail from New York. It was addressed to my mother; but, fortunately, it fell into my hands, and being suspicious, I opened it. You can see the fiend's vengeance is being glutted. Our little one is dead, and he has sent mother the proof. I have suppressed all knowledge of the photograph till I can hear from you. Come up on the first train after you get this. There is no one here to whom I can talk, not even Wayne. I am as nearly crazy as a man can be who has to wear a false countenance and mask his heart.

"BURNS."

Just as Nick turned to several of the other letters, a servant entered with a telegram.

It was also from Burns.

Nick smiled as he read it, and passed it to Chick.

The telegram ran thus :

"Blankville, June —, 1894.

"NICK CARTER, New York City: The grave of Captain Gray was desecrated last night. What does it mean? Come at once. I have telegraphed to Wayne. BURNS."

The detective went to his desk and wrote the following message in reply :

"Dr. VIVIAN BURNS, Blankville: Impossible for me to leave New York to-day or to-morrow. Important business detains me.

But will be with you early day after to-morrow morning by first train. Try to keep news of your child's fate from the ladies till I can see you; and keep mum. CARTER."

This he sent at once to the telegraph office. Then turning to his aids, he said :

"Now, boys, we'll have some breakfast, and then for a good sleep to refresh us against the adventures which are before us on the next two nights."

"Hold on, Nick," exclaimed Chick, as if he had just remembered something.

"Well! What is it, my boy?"

"We are to visit Wayne's Long Island retreat to-night, are we not?"

"Yes."

"Then there is no sleep for me during the next few hours."

"Why?"

"Because I must go and do what, in my stupidity, I forgot to do when I had the opportunity."

"And what is that?"

"Find out just where this hermitage of Wayne's is."

"Then you can go to your room at once and sleep the sleep of the just, for I need no directions to the place."

"You know where it is?"

"As a bird knows its nest."

"How did you find out?"

"By a photograph."

Chick showed his puzzled state of mind by his look.

"Do you remember, Chick," said the detective, speaking slowly, "the house on Long Island where we arrested those counterfeiters four years ago?"

"Why, certainly I do?"

"Well, that is Wayne's retreat. It was deserted after that arrest, and I presume Wayne purchased it cheaply. You have not forgotten that the house is situated in a section which is cursed with malaria, and for

that reason is uninhabited for some miles around."

"I have not forgotten it; no."

"Well, that state of things has served Wayne just as it served those counterfeiters. He has used it to keep people away from his retreat."

"But you have not yet told me how you found out it was that house in which Wayne spends so much time."

"Oh; yes I did, my boy."

"You spoke about a photograph."

"Well, during our official visit to the house four years ago, my attention was attracted by one of the most oddly constructed mantels I ever saw."

"I remember it now. It was in the dining room. The mantel was hand carved and contained the heads of a bear, a lion, a horse and several other animals."

"Yes; including the face of a woman. It was the rough work of some amateur wood-carving genius who had plenty of time, lots of patience and some sharp tools."

"Well?"

"Now, I'll show you the photograph of that mantel."

So saying Nick took from his pocket the photograph of the dead child which he had just received from Burns, and held it before Chick's face. His assistant looked, and after one sharp, piercing glance, muttered:

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

For he saw what had escaped his observation in the first inspection when his eyes had been centered upon the child in the picture. In the half blurred imperfect background he saw the indistinct outlines of a mantel, and on the mantel were the carved heads, sure enough.

To make these tell-tale objects stand out more clearly Nick brought a microscope to bear upon them. Then there was no possible doubt about Nick's original discovery.

"This picture was taken by a flash light by an amateur artist," said Nick, "and that oddly constructed mantel was caught in the background."

"I say, Nick."

"What now, lad?"

"Wayne means to accomplish his entire revenge, whatever it may be, within a very short time or he wouldn't have been so careless about sending a photograph of a room in his house to his victims."

"You are right, Chick, and that is why we must work fast."

"Wayne will not be at the retreat tonight."

"Certainly not. He will go to Blankville after receiving Burns' message about the grave robbery."

"Then we'll have no one to deal with but Bulah."

"Probably. But he may be enough. Bulah is no ordinary person."

* * * * *

Nick and his two assistants left New York for their Long Island destination early that night. They traveled in a closed carriage with a trusted driver on the box—a man who knew every road, highway and byway within forty miles of New York. No other than the faithful Patsy.

It was about one o'clock when the detectives got out of the carriage and stretched their cramped limbs.

Leaving the team by the roadside, Nick led the way through a small collection of trees which covered about three acres of ground.

On the opposite edge of these woods he stopped and pointed to a low, oblong structure standing on the edge of another group of trees across an open space of ground, probably three hundred yards wide.

"That's the house," whispered Nick.

"Yep. I recognize the old rookery," replied Chick.

Nick struck boldly out across the open space with Chick and Patsy at his side. Their eyes never once left the building in front of them.

Without noise and without apparently being observed, they reached the old house.

A quiet examination of the doors and windows, on that side of the house, showed that the place seemed to be securely locked up, and whatever inmates there might be were asleep.

But Nick Carter never did anything half-way.

So they continued around to the rear, still trying doors and windows. At last, to his evident surprise, the latch of a side door yielded to his touch.

He pushed the door open and peered into total darkness. In a moment his dark lantern was in use, and with it he discovered that the door led into a summer kitchen. In a whisper he said to Chick:

"As soon as we are inside I will drop behind. You and Patsy will take the lantern and proceed on your investigation. I'll not be far off in case you need help at any point in your work."

The three men silently entered.

A close inspection disclosed the fact that the room had not lately been used. A door leading to an inner room stood open. Chick and Patsy entered this room also, but Nick was not with them.

The second room also had a barren, unused aspect.

Without exchanging a word, and without making enough noise to waken a sleeping mouse, the young detectives passed on into a third apartment of larger size.

Here, too, an air of desertion met their inspection under the rays of the dark lantern.

Could it be that their bird had flown?

Thus they passed entirely through the lower part of the house, and no sign of human habitation was seen anywhere.

In passing through the largest or main room, Chick had noticed an open door into a narrow passage where some stairs led to the second story.

Silently signaling to Patsy he returned to this room and approached the stairway.

Flashing his lantern's light upward he noticed that the stairs filled the narrow passage way and ended at a door on the next floor. This door was closed. After a very slight inspection he began to ascend, Patsy following at his heels. Reaching the top he tried the door. It was securely fastened. Before he had time to decide on his next move, the door at the bottom of the stairs closed with a slam. Instantly there followed the sound of shooting bolts and falling iron bars.

The truth flashed upon both men at the same time.

They had walked blindly into a trap.

No word passed between the two men before Chick hurled his powerful frame against the door in front of which he stood.

It made no impression. Patsy joined him in the assault.

Then for the first time they realized the truth.

The door was a blind.

They were butting against solid masonry.

The walls on each side of the stairs were sounded. They, too, were solid.

"Let us try the door down there," were Chick's first words. "That at least has hinges, and is not built into the masonry."

But their combined strength could not so much as make an impression on it.

Suddenly Chick caught Patsy sharply by the arm and began to sniff.

"What's that, lad?"

"Smoke," was Patsy's laconic reply.

"You're right, my boy; the house is on fire, and we are here like rats in a burning ship at sea. I wonder where Nick can be?"

"We certainly deserve all we will get," growled Patsy.

"Right again. Nick said that Bulah was a devil, but I, nevertheless, was taken off my guard, and unless Nick gets us out of this we have less than ten minutes to live. And I fear the black fiend has temporarily overcome Nick."

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF BULAH.

Chick had scarcely uttered the words which close the last chapter, when there was a rattling and a clatter of irons on the outside, and the door flew backward.

The immediate result was not a relief for the imprisoned men. The smoke and heat which rushed in upon them added to their already great distress, and almost overpowered both.

Chick, however, was quick to take in the situation, and he ran out into—what?

The smoke was so dense that no one could have seen half a foot before his face had it been daylight.

Just as the young detective's senses were about to leave him there came a rush of cool air from directly in front of him, which swept the smoke temporarily away, and through the reviving passage thus made, he, with a final effort, staggered forward.

It was a door opened to the outside of the house which had sent in the rush of air.

Through this door Chick tottered and fell weak and gasping just on the outside.

Some one tried to rouse him.

"Is it you, Nick?"

"Yes, Chick. How is it with you?"

"I'm all right, but Patsy. Where is he?"

Without a word of reply, Nick rushed through the door and disappeared in the belching cloud of smoke.

When he came into the open air he

dragged the unconscious form of Patsy after him.

"He is merely overcome with the smoke, Chick, and will come out all right. Let's leave him here. I want you to help me in there. That black fiend has something up stairs which he was going to get when I knocked him down. This way. Follow me."

Leaving Patsy on the ground at a safe distance from the burning house, Nick led Chick around the house to a veranda.

"Look out!" cautioned Nick. But too late, for Chick stumbled over something.

"What is it?"

"The carcass of that fiend, Bulah. That's where I dropped him. Just watch lest he comes around and escapes. I'm going to see what he was going after up here."

So saying, Nick grabbed Chick's lantern and disappeared up a ladder which stood against the side of the house and ended at an open window.

When he returned to Chick's side he bore something in his arms.

"The child?" exclaimed Chick.

"You bet!"

"It's alive and asleep?"

"Soundly!" muttered Nick. "Under the influence of some drug. Well, probably it is just as well till we get her back to New York."

"Let's put the bracelets on this fellow," suggested Chick, giving the form of Bulah a kick. "He'll be coming to soon, and might give us trouble."

Nick lowered his lantern till its lights illuminated the swarthy face. Then he placed a hand on the back of the prostrate man's head.

"I guess handcuffs are not necessary in this case, Chick," he said, as he arose and wiped his hand on the side of the house.

"Not dead?"

"Dead as a door nail. I split his skull

from top to base. Well, I didn't spare the force of the blow and I guess I have not done much harm to society."

"You have done the best for him and mankind that was possible, Nick. Suppose we go and see how Patsy is getting on."

They found Patsy sitting up, rubbing his eyes and trying to get the smoke out of his lungs.

By this time the old house was well wrapped in flames. Suddenly an unearthly scream filled the air, followed by the laugh of what certainly must be a maniac.

"Look! look!" shouted Chick, pointing upward.

They did look! There at a window, fitted up with bars, stood a woman. Her hair was streaming over her shoulders in disheveled masses. Her eyes were full of the fury of the insane. The features were clearly defined in the light which now lit up all the surroundings; the light from the flames of the doomed building.

It was just for an instant. Then, before either of the three men could move, there was a crash, a roar of flames, and millions of sparks in a huge volume of smoke shot up to the sky.

The entire building had fallen in, and the maniac went down with it to an awful death.

Ten minutes later Nick and his assistants were once more in their carriage on their way back to New York. The beautiful sleeping child lay in Nick's arms.

Chick was the first to speak.

"Nick, the woman who perished back there was Mrs. Wayne?"

"No need to ask that question, Chick. It was Mrs. Wayne."

"What torture those fiends put her and her husband to."

Nick's only reply was to compress his lips and gaze down upon the indistinct form of the little one sleeping on his breast.

Nick explained to Chick how it happened that he let the two young men remain locked up in the false stairway so long.

"It was a lucky thing that I remained behind, my boy, and a very foolish trick for you and Patsy both to go up those stairs together."

"I know it, Nick. You can't hit me too hard for my stupidity."

"Well, you're not often so thoughtless."

"Where was Bulah when we entered the house?"

"Concealed somewhere in the second room. He must have believed you two constituted the whole party. At least I had no trouble following him and seeing him shut you in that stairway."

"I watched him set fire to combustibles placed near the stairway designedly, and was prepared to jump on him as he passed me going out."

"But he surprised me momentarily by opening a door leading directly from that room to the outside and making his exit that way."

"I beat a hasty retreat by the way we entered and surprised him just as he set foot on the ladder."

"He was scarcely disposed of when I realized your danger and went to your rescue."

"I was nearly overcome with smoke by the time I got the stair door open, and had I not used the side door to make my exit we all should have been suffocated."

CHAPTER XI.

A TRAIL BENEATH THE EARTH'S SURFACE.

On the following night a storm broke over Blankville. But notwithstanding the warning of the elements, two men sneaked into the cemetery.

Aided by the frequent flashes of lightning they picked their way between trees and grave-stones slowly but surely. They passed

the scene of the grave robbery of two nights before, but scarcely halted at the Gray lot, passing on as rapidly as possible.

Presently they crouched down behind the clump of bushes whence Nick and Chick had watched "the ghost" enter the old deserted vault on a previous occasion.

As they lay there in the shrubbery, wholly regardless of the shrieking wind, pouring rain, sharp, frequent flashes of lightning and crashing thunder, their eyes were fixed in the direction of the gates of the vault.

"If the ghost doesn't walk in this storm," whispered one of the watchers in the ear of the other, "then storms have no fascination for restless souls."

He was right. They had not been in their place of concealment half an hour, and the storm was at its height when a sharper, more lasting flash of lightning than usual lit up the vicinity.

By this light they saw the white-draped ghostly figure standing before the gate of the vault. Then came a half minute of darkness. When the next flash dispelled the darkness the white-robed specter was inside the iron gates in front of the solid iron door which shut off the vault chambers from the outside world.

Another period of inky darkness came, and then by the next flash the two watchers saw—nothing.

The specter had disappeared.

Neither moved for five minutes, nor was a word exchanged between them.

At the end of that time, he who had predicted the ghost's visit arose, whispered: "Come," and started to feel his way toward the gate of the vault.

Of course the reader has guessed that the two men were Nick Carter and Chick.

They were trailing the ghost on its mysterious business into the old unused burial vault.

They reached the iron gates just as another flash of lightning showed them their location.

Nick's hand reached out and with some misgivings he pulled at one of the gates. It moved outwardly without resistance. To his further satisfaction the iron doors yielded to his hands.

Carefully he swung one of them backward, and nothing but stygian darkness was before them. They could not see three inches before their faces.

Giving Chick's shoulder a decided pressure with one hand to warn the latter to be ready, Nick sprung the slide of his dark lantern, and that instant its brilliant light lit up the entire interior of this "house of the dead."

Nothing living save themselves was there. What then had become of the ghost?

There, on the floor of the vault, lay its garb—a long white sheet. But the ghost itself was gone.

Five coffins rested in as many niches cut into the rear wall of the vault.

Both men at the same time saw that one of the five coffins had been turned at a right angle with its original position, thus leaving more than half of the niche unoccupied.

Nick advanced and fearlessly shot the light of his lantern upon this earthen shelf.

"As I supposed," he said, turning to Chick. "There is an opening beyond the coffin. The ghost has gone in there, and I'm going to follow him."

"It's a dangerous undertaking, Nick," warned Chick.

"Well, danger is part of our trade," was the quiet response.

"Shall I follow you or wait here?"

"Neither. Go out and make your way with all haste to the outside of Burns' house, where Patsy is waiting with the child. Be there on guard and ready for any emergency which may arise."

As soon as he was gone Nick swung his lantern around and saw what he evidently was looking for.

Up near the ceiling of the vault above the iron door, beyond the sight of any one who might be outside, was a small opening, evidently not made by the builders of the vault.

"That hole gives air to this underground room," communed Nick.

Then he closed the slide of his lantern, stowed it away in one of his large pockets, and blindly entered the niche beside the displaced coffin.

It was like crawling into a jug. He felt his way into the hole which began at the rear of the niche and crawled forward, for he found that the underground passage was very little larger than was necessary to allow a large sized man to squeeze his way through.

For fifteen minutes he advanced as fast as possible under the circumstances.

Suddenly the hole ended in some large dark apartment, in which he was able to stand erect.

Again he brought forth his lantern and lit up the place.

"As I thought. This is the cellar of Dr. Burns' house," silently commented Nick, looking around. "Ah! there is the stone of the wall which filled up the opening into the passage-way so carefully. It falls inward, and the end of the hole is enlarged to accommodate it. The fellow must have been somewhat of a mechanic to construct such a neat job. Now, how does he get from this cellar to the upper part of the house? Oh! ho! There it is. He has left everything open behind him to expedite a hurried retreat, maybe. Or is this the last move in his game, and he has, therefore, left caution behind?"

As he repeated these words to himself the detective was looking at an opening in the floor above. A board which was tongued and grooved had been so arranged that it

could be slid back under the double floor of the next room like a sliding trap. When closed no one would ever suspect the secret of that board, and would never discover it except by the merest accident.

An empty barrel stood directly beneath the opening—placed there to assist the night visitor to crawl through to the floor above.

Nick was not slow in using the same means to elevate himself, and he found himself in the kitchen of the house. The door leading to the interior of the house stood open, marking the direction taken by the man whose queer trail he was following.

Once more the lantern was darkened and put away. Then Nick began to feel his way through the house.

Not until nearly twenty minutes had elapsed after he emerged in the cellar did he find himself at the head of the stairs on the second floor.

Then a surprise greeted him.

The door of the elder Mrs. Burns' room stood open. Light came from within, and the hum of voices was plainly heard.

To Nick's ready wit the truth of the situation was instantly made clear. The family had been kept awake by the storm which was just dying out, and had assembled in Mrs. Burns' room to keep each other company.

But where was the man whom he had trailed beneath the earth? Had he passed the miscreant somewhere between the cellar and the head of the stairs?

As Nick lay crouched with his head on a level with the top step, and was meditating on whether he should retreat or advance, he suddenly saw the form of a man arise from a hiding place behind a large chest which sat in the hall, and walk straight toward the open door.

It was he who called himself Miles Wayne.

As soon as he came within the light of the

doorway, Nick noticed that Wayne's appearance bore no trace of his passage through the underground tunnel, and the detective argued that the man had probably worn an over suit as he crawled through.

What passed immediately in the room before him demanded all of Nick's attention. Wayne's sudden and unexpected appearance in the doorway was greeted with a faint scream. Then a man's voice demanded:

"What does this mean? Mr. Wayne, where did you come from?"

"I came from Australia originally," was the bold reply. "It means that the hour of my vengeance is at hand."

"Oh God! It is Adrian Lascour!" moaned a woman's voice.

"Ay, Lucille Clyde, the man you deserted—whose love you refused—to marry his rival, stands before you to complete the vengeance he has worked for during eighteen years."

"You fiend!" roared Burns.

Wayne's hand flew up and a pistol confronted the young doctor.

"Don't move. Your time will come soon enough. I intend to kill you, son of Jerome Burns, but those two women must live. To live will be worse than death to them. Do you know why? Because they will know that the younger is the daughter of the other; that she has been for three years the wife of her brother; that she has born her brother a daughter whom she will never again see, but who will be brought up in all the depravity which an illy-begotten child can be taught. I will—"

There was a sudden interruption to his threats. Burns, seeing his wife fall back senseless under the horrible accusation of the man before them, and quick to realize the awful horror of the sudden disclosure, sprang at Wayne in utter defiance of the well aimed pistol.

There was a deafening report and a body fell prostrate upon the floor.

CHAPTER XII.

END OF A VENGEFUL LIFE.

It was not Burns who fell, but the man called Wayne.

The latter had not seen the detective stealing up from behind, so intent was he on the enjoyment of his vengeance, and so secure did he feel from interruption or interference from without.

Nick's ready, powerful fist was not an instant too soon in its work. It struck Wayne on the jugular just as the villain's finger pressed the trigger of the pistol.

It was soon enough to divert the aim several inches, and to save Dr. Burns' life.

Before Burns could realize what had happened, Nick Carter was astride the fallen ex-convict fastening handcuffs to the fellow's wrists.

"Who are you?" gasped Burns, stepping back a few feet and gazing at Nick in amazement.

"I am Nick Carter."

"Thank God! But you are not in time. Why did you not come soon enough to stop that man's hellish tongue!" groaned Burns.

"He may have been lying," said Nick, merely for the purpose of relieving Burns' mind temporarily, not that he doubted Wayne's statement about Burns and his wife being brother and sister.

Wayne recovered consciousness in time to hear Nick's words. Rolling over on his back he almost shrieked:

"It is the truth, and you know it, Nick Carter. That young woman over there is Lucille Burns' daughter, whom my faithful Bulah stole from her eighteen years ago."

Mrs. Burns, the elder, sprang from her chair at this moment, a strange light shining from her face. Striding forward till she stood

over the prostrate villain, she gave him a look of triumph which neither he nor Nick could understand until she spoke.

"I could almost ask Heaven to forgive you, Adrian Lascour, for returning my daughter to me the pure and noble girl she is."

"Pure and noble!" sneered Lascour. "Pure and noble! the wife of her brother; the mother of his incestuous child, the——"

"No!" fairly shrieked Mrs. Burns. "God is good! May He forgive me for reviling His name when He took away my boy in his early babyhood. I now see the hand of His mercy in it. He thwarted your wickedness before it was conceived, glory be to His name."

"What mummery is this?" frothed Wayne, as something of the meaning of her words and a conviction of their truth forced itself on his mind.

"It is no mummery. My boy died when he was a year old. The man who stands there is the son of my adoption only—not of my flesh or blood. I meant that he should never know. But now that I have my daughter again, and he is my son-in-law as well as by adoption I can defy you, you imp of Satan!"

The long suffering woman could not repress her happiness. She flew to the side of her insensible daughter, and gathering her up tenderly in her arms, pressed her to her bosom, and rained tears and kisses upon her face.

Lascour uttered a bitter oath and raised to a sitting posture.

"At least my Bulah has your little whelp in his possession. Through it he will torture you long after I am rotting in my grave."

"Hug no such delusion to your breast, Lascour," now interrupted Nick. "Your faithful Bulah is dead, and little Dorotha

Burns is safe and well not five hundred yards from this house."

At that moment a violent ringing was heard at the door-bell.

"Go down and admit the late caller," said Nick, addressing the half stupefied Burns. "It is my assistant."

Burns hastened to obey. In a few minutes he came rushing back. Little Dotty was in his arms, strained to his breast, while Chick, Patsy, Lizzie and Dan crowded in on his heels, closely followed by the two terrified house servants in their night clothes.

Burns was speechless with joy. He rushed to the side of his wife, who had just returned to consciousness in her mother's arms, and held up the little one before her astonished eyes.

Dotty reached out her chubby arms and cried: "Mamma! G'an'ma!"

The next moment her little body was half crushed in the embrace of the mother, while the grandmother was hastily removing the horror of Lascour's words by revealing the truth about Vivian's birth.

An awful sound, a cross between a roar and a shriek, called everybody's attention to Lascour.

He had risen to his feet and was glaring at the happy family group before him.

A realization came upon him that all he had spent his life time to attain had failed. The effect was more than he could bear.

Suddenly his manacled hands flew toward his head. He tottered and fell headlong to the floor.

Ten minutes later he was dead.

"Burst a blood vessel in his brain," was Nick's sententious explanation, as he threw a rug over the blackened, distorted face of the corpse.

Thus ended a life which for nearly a quarter of a century had been devoted to a work of vengeance.

It was Jerome Burns whose testimony had convicted him—who afterward married the girl for the love of whom he committed the crime which sent him to servitude. His escape and terrible vengeance on his successful rival is known. After that he lived only for revenge on the woman he had lost.

Bulah, the East Indian, was a fellow-convict. They escaped together, and in their flight Lascour risked his own life to save his companion's by killing a pursuing guard. Thence forward Bulah consecrated his life to Lascour. Under the directions of the latter the Hindoo stole Mrs. Burns' child, on the same day that the father was assassinated after being unmercifully tortured.

The two convicts, with the child, escaped by means of an outlawed sailing vessel. Lascour joined in the smuggling business and soon amassed a fortune.

Meanwhile, the little girl was sent to a convent school.

Then he took up his work of vengeance. He followed Mrs. Burns and her supposed son to Blankville. With his white hair and beard he felt sure he would not be detected.

With a cunning wickedness he brought Vivian and Mildred, his supposed daughter, together.

Everything went as he would have it. They fell in love. He saw them married.

Meanwhile, he had dealings with one man in New York—Miles Wayne, the broker, who invested his money for him. Unfortunately he met Miles Wayne's wife and fell in love with her. The Waynes were invited to visit him. He made it so profitable to Wayne that the latter went often to Blankville.

He knew Bulah had the secret of a drug which would produce a suspension of human life or a state so near to death that it could not be detected from the real. The Hindoo also claimed that he had the antidote which

would restore the victim to life any time within sixty hours after the drug was taken. At the end of sixty hours the drug would lose its effect and the victim would revive without the drug.

Mrs. Wayne was the first victim. Lascour had two reasons for giving her the drug, first to get her into his power; secondly, to test the drug and antidote before he tried it on himself.

The Hindoo's art worked to perfection. They successfully revived the poor woman and kept her under the influence of narcotics in the old vault for some days.

Then came Lascour's turn. After Bulah resurrected him he used the means already prepared to transform himself into Wayne's double.

Wayne was decoyed to the house on pretenses that the daughter, Mildred, wanted to consult him on business. He never left it alive. The drug was administered the third time. The Wayne who left the house and walked back to Blankville was the false one whom we have known.

The real Wayne's body was dragged that night through the underground passage to the grave-yard, placed in George Gray's empty coffin and was buried alive.

Mrs. Wayne was spirited away to the Long Island lonesome retreat, where her mind finally gave way under the inhuman treatment she received at the hands of Lascour and Bulah.

Before his supposed death, the pretended George Gray planned and constructed the communication between his cellar and the old vault in the grave-yard.

He did the work himself, spending several hours during the latter part of every night while Bulah kept watch.

Thus the work ran through more than a year.

The patience of the man and his slave in

the work of vengeance convinced Nick that Lascour was a madman before he followed the Burnses to Blankville.

"Mad as a March hare, Chick!" declared Nick, when they had got back to New York, and were talking it over.

"I guess you are right, Nick," assented Chick. "But of all the madmen with whom

we've had to deal, that Lascour had the most method to his insanity."

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain "Nick Carter at the Races; or, Two Kinds of a Lead Pipe Cinch."

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